DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 941 FL 019 433

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TITLE Intercultural Communication Education: A Classroom Case.
PUB DATE May 91
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the International Communication Association (Chicago, IL, May 23-27, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; College Students; Comparative Analysis; *Cultural Awareness; *Curriculum Design; Higher Education; *Intercultural Communication; Questionnaires; *Speech Communication

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine how an intercultural communication course in speech communication affects students' responses to intercultural communication. It was hypothesized that students would show significant differences after participating in the course. Students from an intercultural communication and research methods course were used as the compared groups in this study. The results of ANOVA showed that the hypothesis was supported. Limitations and directions for future research were discussed as well. (Author)

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Intercultural Communication Education: A Classroom Case

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ABSTRACT

The study was designed to examine how the intercultural communication course in speech communication affects students' responses to intercultural communication. It was hypothesized that students will show significant differences after they take the course. Students from the intercultural communication course and research methods course were used to serve as the compared groups in this study. The results of ANOVA showed that the hypothesis was supported. Limitations and directions for future research were discussed as well.

Intercultural Communication Education: A Classroom Case

What effect, if any, does the intercultural communication course in speech communication have on students' responses to intercultural considerations? Is there any value in the intercultural communication course which can help increase positive reactions about communicating interculturally? Although a number of studies have been conducted to examine how communication education affects the student's perception of interaction, few studies have been applied to intercultural settings.

The need for research examining the effect of an intercultural communication course is magnified when one considers the fact that face-to-face contact among people of different cultural backgrounds has increased in recent years. Although the sentiment of Sitaram and Cogdell (1976) is somewhat exaggerated -- "All the people of the world should study intercultural communication" (p. 15) -- the increasing significance of intercultuaral communication education cannot be denied.

Since most institutions of higher education offer intercultural communication courses in speech communication and other related disciplines (Beeche and Biggers, 1986), the impact of such a course may have profound effect upon student's perception and interactions with people from different cultures. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of the intercultural communication course in speech communication on the students' responses to communicating interculturally.

Education vs. Training

The distinction of education and training has been discussed by scholars from different disciplines (e.g., Albert & Triandis, 1985; Bennet, 1986; Foster & Danielian, 1966; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983; Harrison & Hopkins, 1967; Kohls, 1980; Mestenhauser, 1981; Miller, 1979; Wright, 1970). To these scholars, training basically deals with the issue of "how" and education deals with the issue of "why." In the intercultural communication program, training investigates how sojourners can better adapt to a new environment. It frequently implies a skills approach that involves behavior. In other words, training tends to minimize conceptual groundwork and requires participants to demonstrate behavioral ability outside the program (Bennet, 1986).

Education, on the other hand, helps participants understand the theoretical background of learning. It requires learners "not only [to] be able to demonstrate their learning, but they should also be able to apply that learning in creative ways to new environments, acquiring new frames of reference with which to continue inquiry" (Bennet, 1986, p. 118).

However, since the training program inevitably involves preparing participants the educational "why" element, the distinction between training and education is narrowing. Recently, many scholars have used the words "trainer" and "educator" interchangeably to denote "the expectation that both training and education are ideally present in every program" (Bennet, 1986, p. 118), and program participants are usually

referred to as "trainees," "students," or "learners."

The conceptual convergence of training and education has led scholars to create a series of model for intercultural-communication program. For example, Bennet (1986) proposed an intercultural training and educational program in which four distinct approaches were identified. First, the intellectual model, also called the "classroom" or the "University" model, hypothesizes that cognitive understanding is the key to effectiveness in intercultural communication. The approach stresses "cognitive goals, culture specific content, and traditional education ['intellectual'] processes" (p. 122).

Second, the area training approach, also called the "simulation" model, emphasizes "affective goals, culture specific content and experiential processes" in which the learners are active participants in the learning process (p. 124). Third, the self-awareness approach, also called the "human relations" model, assumes that "the individual who understands himself better will understand his culture better and will, consequently, be more effective abroad." Participants are considered a functioning unit (p. 125). Lastly, the cultural awareness approach requires participants to "recognize their own values, to analyze contrasts with other cultures and finally to apply the insights gained to improving the effectiveness of interaction" (p. 127).

Other similar approaches were provided as well by Brislin (1979, 1989), Gudykunst, Hammer, and Wiseman (1977), Sikkema and Niyekawa (1987), and Triandis (1977). The techniques, such as

case study, role playing, simulations, critical incidents, and cultural assimilators, used to implement these training and educational programs have been discussed by many scholars (e.g., Brislin, 1986; Brislin, Cushner, Cherrie, & Yong, 1988; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983; Holmes & Guild, 1979a, 1979b, 1979c; Hoopes & Push, 1979; Hoopes & Ventura, 1979; Weeks, Penersen, & Brislin, 1986).

The present study was based on the assumption that the goals of training and educational programs can be fulfilled by a well-planned curriculum of intercultural communication course in the college.

Design of the Curriculum

The major goal of this curriculum design was to prepare students to function effectively and appropriately in intercultural settings and to help them become more flexible and creative in interacting with people from different cultures through the processes of learning cultural-specific and cultural-general knowledge. It was believed that the students, by being given a semester of instruction and training, would search and find out for themselves ways of interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, since this design for intercultural communication learning was based on the assumption that the goal can be achieved within the limitations of a well-planned curriculum, it was believed that at the end of the semester, students' responses to intercultural communication would show significant change.

The designed course used in this study was a junior-level course in the Department of Speech Communication titled "Intercultural Communication." The purpose of this course was to give students an introduction to the complex area of intercultural communication and to prepare students for more in-depth knowledge and experience in dealing with people from different cultures when they confronted differences in class lectures, discussions, and exercises.

The major topics discussed in the class included culture and communication, cultural value orientations, cultural perception, verbal and nonverbal communication, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural communication competence, and intercultural training. Students explored these topics primarily in three textbooks: (1) Samovar, Porter, and Jain's (1981) "Understanding Intercultural Communication," (2) Kohls' (1984) "Survival Kit for Overseas Living," and (3) Stewart's (1979) "American Cultural Patterns: A Cross Cultural Perspective." Besides the textbooks, students were required to read 13 additional articles concerning these topics. Methods of instruction were supplemented by practical training techniques including case study, role playing, film, and direct interaction with international students.

In order to gain credits in the class, students were required to complete three short papers: (1) to describe their own cultural value orientations, (2) to create a cultural assimilator based on a cultural incident which had occurred in their life, and (3) to get acquainted with an international student and complete a short

paper about the international student's culture. In addition, the students were required to complete two objective examinations.

Through this 15-week educational program, students were expected to increase their positive perception on assumptions of intercultural communication. The following hypothesis was advanced:

H1: Subjects will score significantly higher on the test after they complete the 15-week educational program.

Subjects' demographic data were analyzed as well to determine any significant differences according to sex and marital status. Moreover, a research question concerning going-abroad experience was generated.

R1: Is there a significant difference between students who go abroad and students who have never gone abroad?

Method

Subjects

This study was conducted in a midsize public university located in the New England area. Eighty students in the Department of Speech Communication were used for the purpose of this study. The 41 students (male - 18, female- 23), averaging 20.05 in age, were from two sections of junior-level intercultural communication course, and 39 students (male - 18, female - 21), averaging 21.17 in age, were from two sections of a junior-level research methods course. Each group had the same instructor, and all participants had never taken intercultural communication or related course before the study.

Procedures

The 41 subjects in group 1 (intercultural communication course) served as the experimental group, and the 39 subjects in group 2 (research methods course) served as the compared group in this study. During the first week of the semester, the investigator went to each class to explain the purpose of the study and distribute a 22-item questionnaire to the students. The data collected at this stage were counted as the pre-test results. During the last week of the semester, the investigator went to each class again and asked the students to fill out the same questionnaire. The data collected at this stage were counted as the post-test results. Subjects in the experimental group were also asked to answer seven questions about the instructing materials and techniques and two questions on how much the course helped them in understanding and interacting with people from different cultures. At this stage, data were obtained from 76 of the 80 students. The remaining four students were absent or had dropped the course. Forty of these students were in the experimental group with the remainder in the compared group.

Questionnaire

In order to reduce the items of the original 50 items of assumptions concerning intercultural communication, 177 freshmen in the basic courses of the speech communication were tested. After factor-analyzing the data, 22 items were clustered together. The 22-item questionnaire was then made for the purpose of this study. Appendix A shows the questionnaire. In this study, in

addition to responding to several demographic items, subjects were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the 22-item questionnaire about intercultural communication.

Responses were made on a 7-point Likert scale with "7" representing strong agreement, "1" indicating strong disagreement, and "4" representing undecided. The coefficient alpha of the questionnaire was .84. Except for these items, subjects in the experimental group also completed a 7-item and a 2-item scales in the post-test stage. Both scales were also based on 7-point Likert scale with "7" indicating help very much, "1" indicating not at all, and "4" representing not sure.

Results

The one-way analysis of variance was used to examine the differences of pre-test and post-test results of the two groups on their perceptions of communicating interculturally. The results were summarized in Table 1. The results showed significant differences between the pre-test of group 1 (M = 5.27) and the post-test of group 1 (M = 5.75), between the post-test of group 1 (M = 5.75) and the pre-test of group 2 (M = 5.19), and between the post-test of group 1 (M = 5.75) and the post-test of group 2 (M = 5.24). No significant difference was found between the pre-test of group 1 and the pre-test of group 2, between the pre-test of group 1 and the post-test of group 2, and between the pre-test of group 2 and the post-test of group 2.

Insert Table 1 About Here

The results of subjects' evaluation on the instructing materials and techniques in the experimental group are reported in Table 2. The results showed the mean scores of the seven items: case study (M = 5.76), role playing (M = 5.07), film (M = 5.70), interaction with international student (M = 6.10), textbooks (M = 5.30), examinations (M = 5.02), and paper writing (M = 5.65). The results of the two additional questions were: (1) How much the class helps you to understand intercultural communication (M = 6.21), and (2) How much the class helps you to interact with people from different cultures (M = 6.18).

Insert Table 2 About Here

Lastly, the results of t-test, used to analyze the differences on sex, marital status, and going-abroad experience on the perception of communicating interculturally, showed significant differences on subjects who had gone abroad (M = 5.49) and subjects who had never gone abroad (M = 5.03), $t(136) = 3.69$, $p < .001$. No significant difference was found on sex and marital status.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate the impact of intercultural communication education on students' responses to communicating interculturally. Hypothesis 1 predicted that subjects will score higher on the test after completing the

15-week intercultural communication course. The results showed that Hypothesis 1 was supported. Those students in the experimental group showed significant differences in their responses to communicating interculturally before and after the course.

The results suggest that through a deliberate design of curriculum, the intercultural communication course can positively change students' reactions to the issues of intercultural communication. It will be interesting for future research to investigate whether or not this positive improvement of perception helps students better adapt to the culture where they sojourn. In other words, the results only focus on the perceptual level of communication; it is necessary to examine the influence of this perception improvement in the real situation. Furthermore, the course of the study may be applied as well to people who sojourn in another culture. This may help us examine how the results of intercultural communication education affect the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

The research question 1 sought to examine the differences between subjects who had gone abroad and those never having gone abroad on the responses to intercultural communication. The results showed that significant differences exist between the two groups. Subjects who had gone abroad before the study showed higher scores than subjects who had never gone abroad. This confirms the importance of experiential learning and behavioral training in the learning program of intercultural communication

advocated by scholars (e.g., Brislin, 1979; Gudykunst, Hammer, & Wiseman, 1977; Sikkema & Niyekawa, 1987). The results also suggest an interesting question for future research: that is, will those students who go abroad show higher ability to interact with people from different cultures after they have taken the intercultural communication course than those who have never gone abroad?

The results on Table 2 showed the degree of students' evaluation on educational techniques used in the experimental group. The results indicated that subjects like most the assignment of interacting with international students. This, again, reveals the importance of experiential and behavioral training in the learning process. The instructor must take this factor into consideration when trying to design the curriculum of an intercultural communication course.

Case study and film techniques gained high scores as well. Nevertheless, subjects scored low in role playing techniques. According to Hoopes and Pusch (1979), the purpose of role-playing is "to offer an experience that stimulates thoughts and feelings which then can be related to concepts and built into a framework for understanding and personally dealing more effectively with cross-cultural relations" (p. 179). Janis and Mann (1965) also found that role-playing could be a very powerful force in modifying the learner's attitudes. However, in order to successfully handle this technique, role-playing must be "planned, introduced, and led by a person with adequate training and

experience". and it is inappropriate to use it "with all people or groups" in the class (Barker, Wahlers, Watson, & Kibler, 1987, p. 212). Since all students in the experimental group in this study were required to take part in the exercises, the uncomfortable feelings from some students may have caused the less preferable evaluation on this technique.

The results, not surprisingly, also showed low scores on the assignments of reading textbooks and taking examinations. But, surprisingly, subjects scored higher on writing papers. One plausible explanation is that the assigned papers in this class were short and, by requiring creative thinking, combined practical and theoretical perspectives of intercultural communication. Future research may continue to investigate whether or not this method can really stimulate student's interest in writing class papers.

Lastly, the results of the last two additional questions showed that subjects think the overall class helps them understand intercultural communication and will help them to interact with people from different cultures. This indicates the success of this class in which educational and training skills are combined. However, for future research, scholars must examine whether or not the results do really help students interact with host nationals when they sojourn in another culture.

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Appendix A

Directions: This instrument is composed of statements concerning what you think about intercultural communication. There are no right or wrong answers. Please work quickly and record your first impression by indicating the degree to which each statement applies to you whether:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree			Are Undecided			Strongly Disagree

1. It is difficult to communicate well with people from different cultures.
2. All cultural groups should be welcome in any country.
3. There exists too many cultures in the world.
4. People from different cultures always cause problems.
5. The cost of intercultural communication is never too expensive.
6. To marry people from other cultures is acceptable.
7. Intercultural communication may harm one's beliefs.
8. People have a need to visit foreign countries.
9. We have given too much attention on cultural differences.
10. Learning about cultural differences is beneficial to personal growth.
11. People from different cultures are narrow-minded.
12. Different cultural events would promote understanding.
13. There is little we can do to improve intercultural relations.
14. It is easy to talk to people from different cultures.
15. Cultural differences are getting worse.
16. Cultural differences exist in society but we can never fully understand their differences.
17. What is good for any culture is good for us.
18. Education is of no help in understanding people from different cultures.
19. To understand cultural differences is important.
20. Communication with people from different cultures is doomed to fail.
21. It is easy to disclose oneself to people from different cultures.
22. It is ridiculous to learn foreign language.

Table 1

One Way Analysis of Variance Tests with Means and Standard Deviations of Intercultural Communication

Group	Mean	SD	df	F-Value	Probability
Group 1 (Pretest)	5.27	.49	3/153	30.19	.001
Group 1 (Posttest)	5.75	.40			
Group 2 (Pretest)	5.19	.61			
Group 2 (Posttest)	5.24	.48			

Note. The larger the mean values, the more positive the perception on communicating interculturally.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Evaluation on Class Materials and Teaching Techniques

Items	Mean	SD
Case Study	5.76	1.30
Role Plays	5.07	.29
Film	5.70	.30
Interacting with Foreign Students	6.10	.18
Textbooks	5.30	.23
Examinations	5.02	.22
Papers	5.65	.22

Note. The larger the mean values, the more positive the evaluation on the items.